

Week of July 8, 2002: MaineDOT Flash Facts
Topic: Elderly Driving Issues

Monday:

Studies show that drivers have fewer crashes as they gain experience with age. However, the crash rate starts to increase as people reach their seventies.

If you are a driver over 70, be aware of the physical changes that can effect your skills behind the wheel.

1. Vision (clear vision, peripheral vision, and ability to adjust to sudden changes in light.)
2. Decreased physical flexibility (Harder to turn and look back; could also affect your ability to steer and brake.)
3. Medications can affect both mental and physical abilities (Talk to your physician or pharmacist about your prescriptions and driving)
4. Reaction time - your reflexes become slower
5. Past or current medical conditions may affect your driving ability
6. Ability to judge speed diminishes with age.

Protect yourself and others by knowing your limitations and not taking chances on the road.

Wednesday:

One out of ten licensed drivers in Maine is over 70 years old.

Older drivers are most at risk in the following situations:

- Intersections [20% of all Maine crashes happen at intersections, but for drivers over 70, that number nearly doubles (36%)].
- Following too close. (Rear end crashes involving the elderly are 25% higher than the statewide average).
- Yielding the right of way
- Turning (especially left turns) (Older drivers have difficulty judging speed and distance.)
- Lane changing
- Passing
- Using highway ramps

Be especially careful in these situations if you are an older driver.

Friday:

Earlier this week we talked about the increased risk factors for older drivers. Today we want to provide tips older drivers can use to keep themselves and others safe on our roads.

Driving is a complicated task. If you are not mentally or physically up to it, you can be a threat to yourself and others on the road.

Warning signs that your driving skills maybe slipping:

- Increase in near misses and even crashes (including minor bumps that never used to happen).
- Getting lost (even in familiar areas).
- Cars or pedestrians seem to appear out of nowhere.
- Getting confused or uncomfortable at busy intersections.

Some tips for the elderly (many of these apply to all ages as well)

- Do not drive when under stress.
- Leave plenty of room between you and the car in front.
- Travel streets that you are familiar and comfortable with.
- Allow time for your eyes to adjust from light to dark conditions.
- Drive when you are rested.
- Avoid distractions when driving.
- Plan ahead and travel when weather and light conditions are good.

Driving privileges are so important in today's society, but your safety is even more vital. If you have concerns about your driving skills, consult with your physician and family.